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Feature Article

Teens and Drugs: Rite of Passage or Recipe for Addiction?

Teen drug use shouldn't be looked at as a rite of passage but as a public health problem, say experts, and one that has reached "epidemic" levels.

In a new report on drug, alcohol and tobacco use among teens in the U.S., the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University finds that 75% of all high school students have used alcohol, tobacco or either legal or illicit drugs and that 20% of these adolescents are addicted.

The data also support previous studies that link early substance use to addiction later in life: 90% of Americans who are currently addicted started smoking, drinking or using drugs before age 18. A quarter of those who begin using addictive substances at these early ages become addicted as adults, while only one in 25 who start using these substances after age 21 does.

"What this data show is that any adolescent is at risk of using substances, and that it's preventable," says Dr. Leslie Walker, president of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine chief of adolescent medicine at the University of Washington.

Susan Foster, director of policy research at CASA, says the data highlight the fact that it's not just substance abuse that is potentially harmful to developing teens, but any substance use at all. "Science tells us that the earlier we start to use, the greater the risk of becoming addicted. Adolescence is the critical period for starting to use drugs and acquiring addictions, [because] the part of the brain that is responsible for judgment, decision-making and impulse control isn't completely developed. And because the teen brain isn't completely developed, it's more sensitive to the impact and damaging consequences of drugs. The drugs increase the chance that kids will take risks and have impaired judgment, and that in turn impairs development and increases the risk of addiction."

While that's true, it's worth noting that some kids are more likely to use drugs than others, namely those who have addicted or abusive parents, are vulnerable to mental health problems, or have experienced some kind of trauma. Early drug use can itself increase risk of addiction later on, but the major increases in risk are due to abuse, trauma and predisposition to mental illness - all factors that may contribute to the risk of early drug use.

While alcohol use among teens has started to drop slightly between 2009 and 2010, misuse of prescription drugs such as Oxycontin and medications for attention deficit disorder continues to climb.

Adolescent health experts say that part of the reason for the upward trends has to do with the mixed messages that both parents and society send to adolescents about drug use. "One of the things you hear is that every teen is going to [try some addictive substance]," says Walker. "So what's the big deal, this is normative, and it's fine. But the data shows that no, we should not accept this as normative for adolescents to use and there's a reason they shouldn't be using, and there are things we can do about it."

For one, she says, parents can educate themselves about the harm that using substances such as tobacco, alcohol and marijuana can have on their child's cognitive development, affecting their ability to form proper judgments and mature emotionally. If parents excuse use of these substances because they're preferable to "harder" drugs such as cocaine, then teens won't learn the important lesson that any exposure to these substances can be harmful to them.

And the costs aren't just limited to possible deficits in development. Drug use carries a high price tag for society as well, with underage drinking costing an estimated \$68 billion yearly in property as well as criminal justice system costs, and substance abuse tallying about \$14 billion in juvenile justice fees. "Overall we haven't made a huge impact on the number of kids who try something during their teens," says Walker. And that's why the report focused on collecting data on all aspects of substance abuse to provide doctors and parents with a more complete picture of the problem. "We need to address substance abuse more globally. For parents, start talking to your kids when they ask questions in elementary school. Talk to them about your beliefs and feelings about drugs - and teach them that they can hurt them and hurt their development," she says. "And most important, continue that conversation throughout their teens. Establish clear guidelines and set clear consequences for infractions of family rules."

SOURCE: Time; Alice Park: <http://healthland.time.com/2011/06/29/teens-and-drugs-rite-of-passage-or-recipe-for-addiction/>

Community Impact

Youth Dynamics receives grant to expand substance abuse services to locations in Missoula and Cascade County.

Youth Dynamics has received a grant from the Montana Healthcare Foundation to expand substance abuse services to our Great Falls and Missoula locations. Substance abuse issues are common among youth in Montana. Among youth that have substance abuse issues, over 40% suffer from a co-occurring mental and behavioral health disorder. The addition of substance abuse services at our Great Falls and Missoula offices will help us to better support youth and families by creating better outcomes for youth experiencing co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders.



Substance abuse services will now be available through Youth Dynamics at our Great Falls, Missoula, Billings, Boulder, Havre, and Kalispell locations.



Program Spotlight: The benefits of substance abuse treatment and support through Youth Dynamics.

Early intervention is important for youth that are experiencing substance abuse issues. Substance abuse issues can put youth at risk for physical injury, aggression, criminal activity, sexual risk taking, being a victim of crime, suicide or self-injury, and addiction issues later in life.

There are several benefits to enrolling youth with substance abuse issues into treatment and support through Youth Dynamics.



Wrap-Around Care

Over 40% of Montana youth with substance abuse issues also suffer from mental and behavioral health disorders. In order to give youth the best chance for recovery it is important to address mental health issues alongside substance abuse concerns. Substance abuse services are provided at the same location as mental health services to facilitate a team approach and great wrap-around care. Youth case managers can help with coordinating appointments, while mentors can work with youth on developing healthy hobbies and coping skills to use at home and in the community. For youth at our group homes in Billings and Boulder, substance abuse services are available on site, providing a sober environment for youth to work on their recovery so that they can thrive in their home and community upon discharge.

Availability of Service

Families can come in for consultation when they are concerned and not sure what the next steps are. Youth do not need to be referred by another professional in the community to initiate treatment and support. One of our licensed addictions counselors can work with parents to decide if treatment is necessary, and if so, what the next steps for parents or caregivers should be.

Individualized Care

Substance abuse treatment is tailored to the individual needs of each youth and family. Youth who need a lot of structure and support can spend up to 15 hours a week in treatment between groups and individual sessions. Youth that benefit from a less time intensive approach can spend as little as one hour a week, one-on-one with a licensed addictions counselor. For those that need wrap-around care, we can create a unique care plan that includes both mental health and substance abuse treatment, giving youth the best chances for success.

Structure and Support

All youth benefit from structure and support, especially those experiencing substance abuse issues. Our substance abuse program can provide the structure that youth need to reach and maintain their recovery. In our substance abuse program youth have the option of attending several groups a week with peers who are also working on their recovery. During these groups peers hold each other accountable for their substance use. Groups with peers are a great treatment platform which is appealing to youth and also provides the structure and support that they need for success.



Placement Openings

November Available Group Home & Foster Care Openings for Youth

Intensive Level Therapeutic Group Homes

Billings

River's Edge: 1 (Male)

Rimview: 0
STAR: 0

Boulder

New Journey: 0
Choices: 4 (Male)

Homes for Highly Sexualized Behaviors

New Beginnings: 2 (Male)
Opportunity: 2 (Male)

Bozeman - Big Sky Youth Home
3

Helena - Lewis & Clark Youth Home
(Equine Therapy)
0

Please contact Shirley Bulluck at 406-748-3832 or 1-877-458-7022 for group home placement inquiries.

Therapeutic Foster Care Openings

Billings, Contact Rick Watson,
Area Manager,
406-247-4970
0 Openings

Bozeman, Contact Chelsey Voegele,
Area Manager, 406-585-9402
2- Male or Female ages 0-18

Butte, Contact Maggie Pierce, Area Manager,
406-782-5389
1- Male or Female ages 0-18

Helena, Contact Mike McLane, Area Manager, 406-458-7022
2- Male or Female Ages 0-10

Colstrip, Miles City, Glendive, Contact Marci Kapor, Area Manager, 406-748-3084
0 Openings

Wolf Point, Malta, Glasgow, Contact Leslie Berge, Area Manager, 406-653-3948

Great Falls, Contact Mischelle Chambers, Area Manager, 406-453-5592
2- Opening Male or Female 0-8

Shelby and Havre, Contact Vicky Warila, Area Manager, 406-434-7028
0 Openings

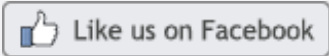
Kalispell and Libby, Contact Jessica Curry, Area Manager, 406-751-8017
1- Male or Female ages 0-5

Missoula and Hamilton, Contact Kerry McKenzie, Area Manager, 406-728-9672
2 - Male or Female ages 0-10

All openings can change from week-to-week; please contact your local representatives for up to date openings.



STAY CONNECTED



Youth Dynamics

1-877-458-7022
www.YouthDynamics.org

*Empowering youth & families
for a brighter tomorrow*



